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ABSTRACT

The Special Education Student Information Network (SESIN), which was established by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in 1972, has two purposes: a) to help equip students with the necessary tools to educate exceptional children in conjunction with college and university teacher training programs and b) to provide information to teacher educators and State education planners on college students' characteristics, needs, interests, and study patterns. SESIN activities include information search, analysis, collection, and retrieval services; instructional materials and media information; workshops and demonstrations; career-oriented consultations; dissemination of project literature; and resource and referral services. The SESIN service function is accomplished in three steps: a) the student identifies and refines his information need with the assistance of an on-campus SESIN student representative, who b) transmits the request to the central SESIN offices, where c) relevant materials are gathered, packaged, and mailed directly to the student requester. Among the benefits derived from SESIN and similar operations are that campus resources are supplemented in a cost efficient manner; duplication of effort is minimized; systemwide fragmentation of teacher education is reduced; and information about student needs is generated from the service statistics of the operation. (HMD)

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A MODEL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORT SERVICES

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by

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I. Introduction.

One important key to the progressive development of Civilized Society is it's process of education - the passing on of old knowledge and time honored traditions to the new generation, as well as the focussed exploration of new knowledge and new skills in the name of Progress.

The American System of Higher Education, that is to say the way in which we educate our professionals beyond the high school level, is a function of this total process of education which has steadily grown in importance and sophistication throughout our history. Such an educational system must, to retain it's viability, continue to respond to the ever changing need and challenges presented by our Society, thereby insuring the quality of necessary social services, whether they be in Medicine, Law, the Sciences, the Arts, or Education.

One integral dimension of this need for accountability to Society is the potential contribution of those individuals involved in the educational process who until recently have been largely ignored - the college student of Today, who is the education leader of Tommorrow.

A concerted first attempt is being made in Pennsylvania under the auspices of the State Department of Education to establish a viable model for higher education support services in the field of special education personnel preparation.

This project is known as the Special Education Student Information Network.

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The ultimate goal of the project is twofold: 1) to help equip college students with the necessary tools to educate exceptional children in a continued quality manner in conjunction with college and university teacher training programs; and 2) to provide new information to teacher educators and state education planners on college student's characteristics, needs, interests, and learning/study patterns in an effort to insure responsiveness of the higher education system to the needs of Society and to contribute to the viability of the teaching/learning process.

II. Need For Support Services.

Until 1972, the process of teacher education was restricted primarily to the college or university campus. The level and type of teacher training resources upon which both faculty and students could draw was essentially predetermined by the college or university attended. In the case of a well endowed university, a large number of training resources including books, journals, films, programmed learning devices, research tools, indexes, curriculum materials, and large, specialized faculties are available. The opposite is also true, where lesser endowed universities must make do with lesser numbers and types of resources for both faculty and student use. Placed in proper perspective, the resulting effect of this situation is a systemwide fragmentation and inconsistency in both the quality and level of teacher preparation.

At the heart of this problem is simply the unprescidented growth in the body of knowledge available for the special educator (and any other educator for that matter) to draw upon. Research studies have demonstrated that across almost every subject of human endeavor the volume of the body of knowledge doubles every eleven years. In our dynamic society, subjects are thrust into prominence very quickly - and just as quickly, it seems, are replaced by others.

In recognition of the implications of this problem, teacher training institutions

across the country must contend with the long range dynamics of this "information explosion." College students must not only be equipped with the basic, fundamental techniques of educating children, they must also become adept at resource identification and resource utilization. A trend in teacher education is beginning to emerge which emphasizes that the college student who achieves the greatest success from his or her learning experience is not the one who tries to answer all the questions himself, but the one who knows where to find the answers. With greater emphasis on the identification and utilization of educational resources and services at the pre-service, or teacher training level, effectiveness of the many in-service level support services (eg. district or county level services and agencies, state and national agencies, libraries, curriculum depositories etc.) can be maximized. The ultimate beneficiary of such an approach is, of course, the exceptional child.

There appear to be two divergent methods to promote this goal of continued quality services for exceptional children. First, teacher education institutions can continue to evolve their programs as relatively autonomous units, relying on their own internal resources to educate teachers. Second, teacher education institutions can supplement and expand their own internal resources through linking up with a regional network of specialized, support services and information resources. Evidence indicates that at least within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the latter method appears viable.

A regional network of specialized, support services establishes new options in the teacher education process, from both an academic and financial viewpoint. First, the status quo campus based resources, (whatever they may be), can be supplemented and buttressed in a cost efficient manner through linkage with a regional support service network. Second, duplication of training materials within the higher education system of a state or region (both print and non-print) can be minimized. Third, relevant information on a topic of inquiry can be retrieved and transmitted from place to place in rapid fashion utilizing the more recent communication innovations

such as teletype and telecopier. Fourth, systemwide fragmentation of teacher education can be reduced. Fifth, outside technical expertise can be provided to teacher training institutions and applied to assist college students in the acquisition of resource oriented skills. And sixth, information on teacher education needs, from the college student viewpoint, can be monitored, studied, and reflected to teacher training institutions and state departments of education through regional tracking of student service usage patterns.

III. SESIN Service Model.

Since the 1972-1973 academic year, the Special Education Student Information Network (SESIN), has been charged by the Pennsylvania Department of Education with regionwide assessment of college student needs and characteristics, as well as areawide development and delivery of information services to undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at five Pennsylvania colleges. This marked the first attempt in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and perhaps the Nation to deliver a broad range of supplementary and support services to college students enrolled in special education teacher training programs.

In practice, the SESIN service delivery model operates in the following manner: a student identifies a topical need for information. The need for information can be either course related or personal, as in the case of scholarship or work/study needs. Having identified an information need, the potential service requestor makes an initial on campus visit to his or her student representative for a consultation. During this visit the student representative works with the student requestor to develop and shape the content of the request. These face to face or "peer interactions" between representative and requestor form the nuculeus of the service delivery model. When the nature and content of the service request are explicitly defined, (and this process often requires thirty to sixty minutes of continuous dialogue), a service request form is filled out by the student representative and mailed to the SESIN central offices.

There it is validated, assigned to a staff member, and processed through the project's Analogue Data Management System. All relevant and supplementary material is retrieved from the manual search system, packaged, and sent directly to the student requestor for his or her use and subsequent evaluation, thereby closing the requestor-to requestor service delivery loop.

The most unique component in the SESIN service delivery model is the student representative. Each representative is a student enrolled in the special education teacher training curriculum at the member college, and also serves as the local contact person on campus, maintaining an office, and scheduling up to twelve office hours per week for direct student access. All requests for services are initiated through the student representative. This process of channelling the flow of service, as opposed to random shotgunning of service has proven most successful.

The range of SESIN activities cover the following: 1) information collection, analysis, search, and retrieval services, both course related and personal; 2) instructional materials and media information services, and curriculum development type information services; 3) campus workshop presentations and demonstrations on the proper selection and usage of media hardware, software, and instructional materials; 4) career oriented consultations; 5) dissemination of project literature and topical publications on current issues and trends in education; and 6) resource and referral service.

All of the above listed services have proven both necessary and beneficial to a large number of college students. The most highly successful of the services has been that of Information. From a potential target population of 1,500 undergraduate and graduate students who are majoring in special education at the five service eligible colleges, 775 valid information requests were received and processed in a 15 month period. In the same period 1,200 students visited the SESIN offices for either consultations, resource assistance, or to use the various literature and information collections.

One reason for the popularity and success of the Information Service has been that

SESIN's information collections and other data bases are not predicated on variance analysis. All information search/retrieval strategies are individualized for each student requestor, or from a systems viewpoint, they are a-logical. Computer based, or machine systems tend to be structured (again from a systems viewpoint) logically. Much subjective and worthwhile information becomes lost in the process, since the computerized information systems are essentially predicated upon variance analysis. SESIN's Analogue Data Management System has been able to maintain the integrity of a systems approach to information search and retrieval, and still preserve the subjective and worthwhile information necessary to an individualized service.

Table 1 below lists the types of services requested, as well as the volume of the respective topics. The time period involved is January 1973 to May 1974.

Table 1: SESIN Service Statistics.

Service Type	Total Volume
Information Services	
1) Exceptionalities	
Mental Retardation	234
Physically Handicapped	17
Deaf	69
Neurologically Impaired	20
Visually Handicapped	6
Speech Handicapped	46
Learning Disabled	100
Severely Retarded	6
Multiply Handicapped	0
Emotionally Disturbed	87
Gifted	9
2) Other Areas	
Urban Education	4
Early Childhood Education	1
Vocational Education	3
Test Information	2
Curriculum Development	3

3) Instructional Materials Information

Language Arts	20
Sensory Motor	6
Social Studies	3
Mathematics	5
Science	2
Fine Arts	3
Vocational Education	3

4) College Or University Information

In State (Pennsylvania)	12
Out of State	10

5) Referral Information

Referrals (All types)	104

Field Services

1) Workshops

Language Arts	5
Mathematics	3
Sensory Motor	2
Science	2
Piagetian Concepts	3
Engineered Classroom	2
Urban Education	1
Music Therapy	2
Early Childhood Education	1
Severely Retarded	2
Vocational Education	1

2) Orientations To Education Services

Seminars	65
Resource Utilization Programs	6

IV. Advantages.

From the above table of SESIN service statistics, one can get a flavoring of student service usage spanning the majority of two academic years. Upon close review and analysis of these various categories of service, discernable trends and patterns begin to emerge.

For example, the three most highly requested topics of information, by exceptionality, are mental retardation, learning disabilities, and emotional disturbance. Since all topics regardless of subject area were selected randomly by students based on their needs, one can imply that these three exceptionality areas receive the most attention at member colleges and universities.

On the other hand, the three least requested topics of information, by exceptionality, are multiply handicapped, severely retarded, and gifted. Again, since all topics regardless of subject area were selected randomly by students based on their needs, one can again imply that these three exceptionality areas receive the least attention at member colleges and universities.

The advantage of having this service usage information becomes clear when considering the formulation of regional or state plans of education. If, hypothetically, a state decided to increase the number of classrooms in it's state for the gifted and the severely retarded, the above figures would tend to indicate relatively limited strength in some of it's teacher training institutions in relation to gifted and severly retarded programs. Having a regionalized, support service network linking all colleges and universities, and with identical service data as listed in Table 1 to draw upon, instead of elaborate and crisis oriented retooling of appropriate personnel preparation programs at training institutions to meet the expected need for more teachers, the higher education system can readily be infused with the necessary resources to meet the increased training demands through a regionalized support service network such as SESIN. Thus a new option for state planners has emerged - one that can can respond dynamically, quickly, and cost effectively. This same principle was adopted in the mid 1960's when major Electrical Interconnections were established to respond to the growing needs of electric power consumers. As a matter of routine, when a local need arises, energies can be brought to bear through an interconnecting system to respond quickly and efficiently to power needs.

Taking this hypothetical example one step further, if all teacher education

institutions within a state or region were linked up to such a regionalized, support service network, education palnners can systematically gauge the level, type, and emphasis of their personnel preparation programs, and compare this information against current educational priorities and plans of action. Where discrepencies between school system needs and personal preparation occur, necessary resources and expertise can be efficiently channelled, and brought to bear on new or expanded personnel preparation needs through the regional service network. At a later time the effectiveness of any given approach can be easily evaluated, as monitoring and "discrepency analysis" are built in functions of the regional, support service network.

Often when such a framework is proposed, the issue of centralized vs. decentralized control arises. At a superficial level, the regional, support service network appears to build in the element of centralized control of personnel preparation. Here the term "supplementary" plays a crucial role in interpreting this issue.

As a supplementary service, the regional support service network functions to preserve the status quo, and/or individualized characteristics of each member institution. The network structure is designed only to channel additional and necessary resources, personnel, or whatever else a given situation may require beyond the level or type available at the member institution. This state of affairs allows individuality to continue from institution to institution and training program to training program while still preserving a coherent, systematic, and systemwide approach to meeting the needs and challenges of educational personnel preparation. It is important to recognize that the regional support service network operates in a linkage, or interface capacity rather to dominate or control training programs.

Additional information on the SESIN model for higher education support services may be obtained from:

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